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How to deal with work email effectively: A
systematic literature review with
recommendations

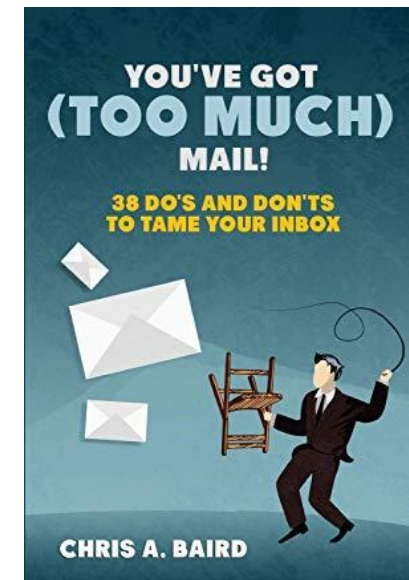
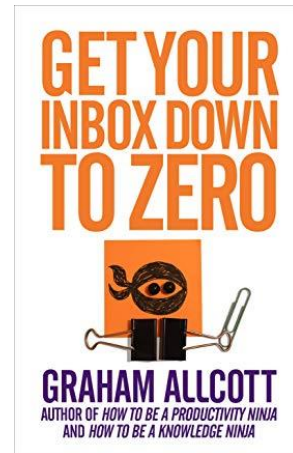
Managing our work email

- In 2018, more than 281 billion work email sent *per day*
- In a 2017 US study 86% of professionals named email as their favourite communication tool
- But there is an email paradox



But what is effective work email activity?

How do work email actions relate to productivity and stress?



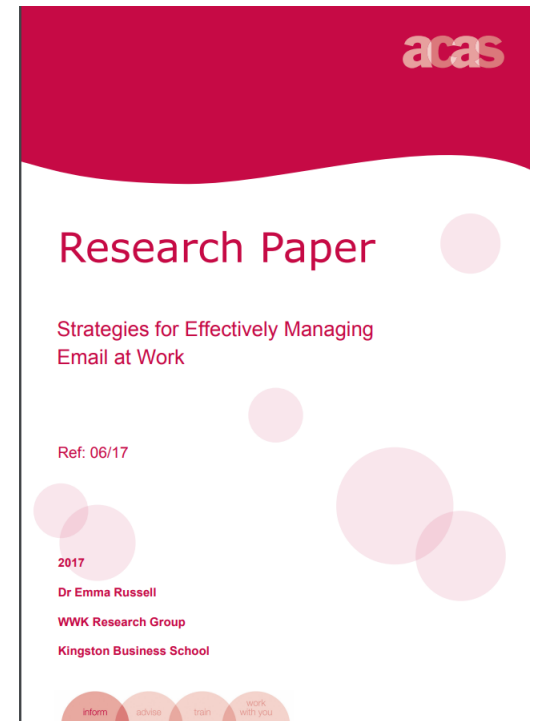
Study commissioned by ACAS

- RQ “*What is effective work email activity?*”
- Aims
 - Create a model linking actions to stress and productivity
 - Identify mechanisms responsible (socio-material approach)
 - Recommendations to end-users/managers/organizations
 - Areas for future research

What did we do?

- Cross-discipline systematic literature review 1995-December 2016
- Three stage development of a conceptual model
- 8 key recommendations

(Rousseau et al., 2008; Petticrew & Roberts, 2008; Briner & Denyer, 2012)



The SLR

42 Final papers:

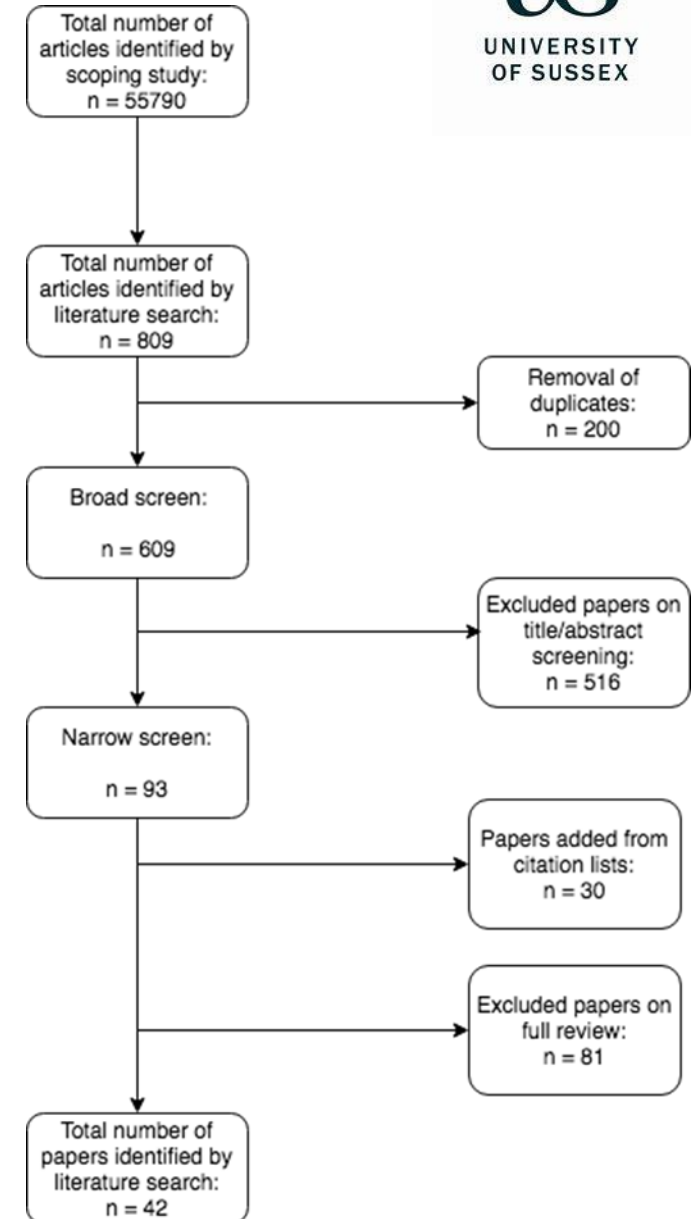
- Management (4), IS (36), Psychology (2)
- Quantitative (21), Qualitative (11), Mixed (10)

Inclusion Criteria:

- Working adults; send/receive/manage email
- Stress/productivity outcomes; positive/negative

Exclusion Criteria:

- Students/non-working; non-empirical studies
- Not email; Not UK/US English; not actions-outcomes



The Stage 1 model

STRESS			Work Email Actions	PRODUCTIVITY		
Family conflict	Strain	Overload		Work effectiveness	Email effectiveness	Commitment
			High level of email use			
			Deals with email out-of-work			
			Undertakes email training			
			High level of mobile email use			
			Regular (not reactive) checking			
			Keeps messages in 'live' inbox			
			Sends email to multiple recipients (cc, reply all, etc)			
			Sends 'work-critical' email			
			Triaging of email (read, action, file, delete)			
			Time management of email			

The Stage 1 model

STRESS			Work Email Actions	PRODUCTIVITY		
Family conflict	Strain	Overload		Work effectiveness	Email effectiveness	Commitment
	(-); (+)	(NS); (+)	High level of email use	(+)	(+)	(+)
(+)		(+)	Deals with email out-of-work	(+)		
	(-)		Undertakes email training	(+)	(+)	
		(+)	High level of mobile email use			
		(-)	Regular (not reactive) checking			
		(+)	Keeps messages in 'live' inbox			
			Sends email to multiple recipients (cc, reply all, etc)		(-)	
		(+); (-)	Sends 'work-critical' email		(+)	
		(-)	Triaging of email (read, action, file, delete)		(+)	
	(-)		Time management of email			

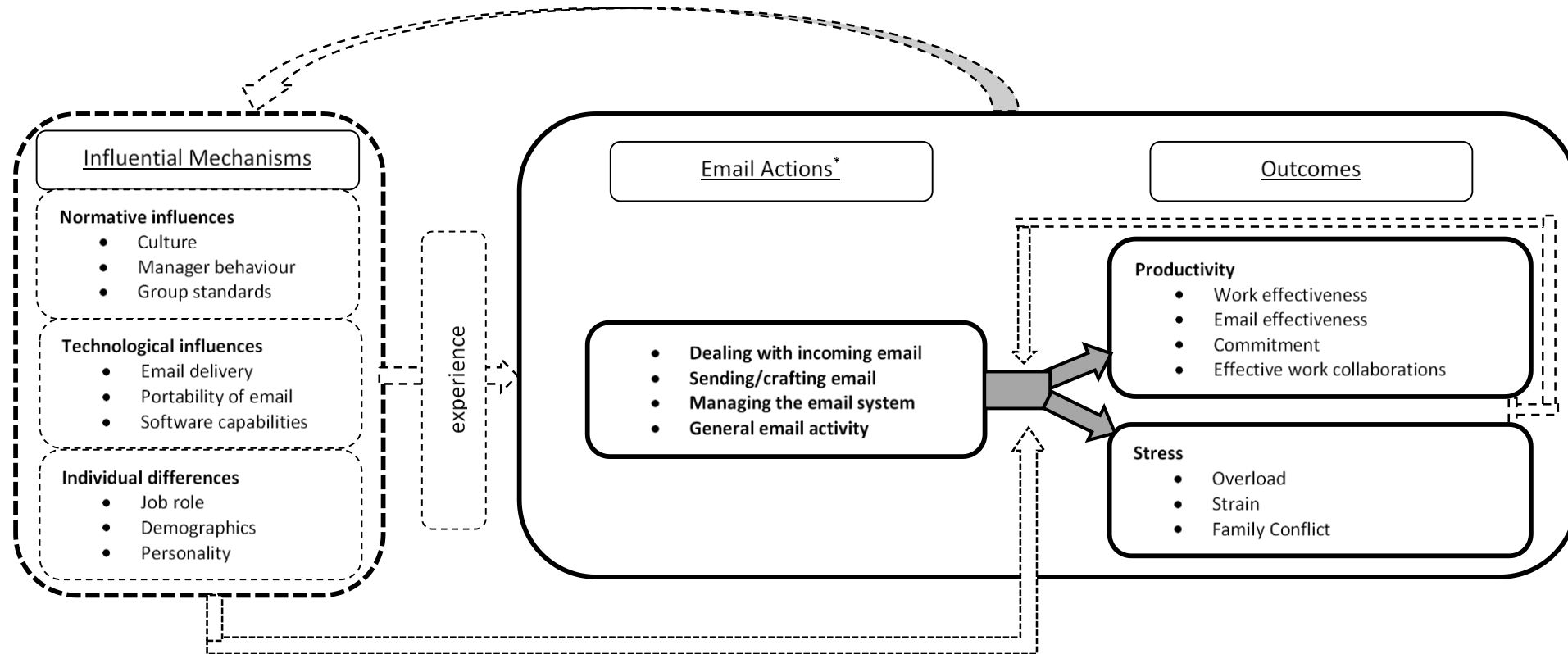
The Stage 2 model

STRESS			Work Email Actions	PRODUCTIVITY			
Family conflict	Strain	Overload		Work effectiveness	Email effectiveness	Commitment	Work collaboration
	(-); (+); (NS)	(NS); (+)	High level of email use	(+); (-)	(+)	(+)	(+); (-); (NS)
(+); (-)	(-), (+)	(+)	Deals with email out-of-work	(+)		(+)	(+)
	(-)		Undertakes email training	(+)	(+)		
	(+); (-)	(+)	High level of mobile email use	(+)		(+)	
		(NS)	<i>Personal email use at work</i>				
			<i>Deals with email in company</i>	(+)			(-)
			<i>Uses email to communicate with work group</i>		(+)		(+); (-)
(-)		(-)	Regular (not reactive) checking	(+)			
		(+)	Keeps messages in 'live' inbox		(+)		
	(-)		<i>Adapts checking actions according to current priorities</i>	(+)			
			<i>Uses shortcuts to action email</i>	(+)			
	(+)	(+)	Sends email to multiple recipients (cc, reply all, etc)	(-); (+)	(-)		(+); (-)
		(+); (-)	Sends 'work-critical' email		(+)		
		(-)	<i>Sends clear, helpful and work-related email</i>	(+)			(+)
	(-)	(-)	<i>Respects others' priorities, workloads and boundaries</i>	(+)			
	(-)	(-)	Triaging of email (read, action, file, delete)		(+)		
	(-)		Time management of email				
			<i>Adds notes to email</i>		(+)		

The Stage 2 model

STRESS			Work Email Actions	PRODUCTIVITY			
Family conflict	Strain	Overload		Work effectiveness	Email effectiveness	Commitment	Work collaboration
	(-); (+); (NS)	(NS); (+)	High level of email use	(+); (-)	(+)	(+)	(+); (-); (NS)
(+); (-)	(-), (+)	(+)	Deals with email out-of-work	(+)		(+)	(+)
	(-)		Undertakes email training	(+)	(+)		
	(+); (-)	(+)	High level of mobile email use	(+)		(+)	
		(NS)	Personal email use at work				
			Deals with email in company	(+)			(-)
			Uses email to communicate with work group		(+)		(+); (-)
(-)		(-)	Regular (not reactive) checking	(+)			
		(+)	Keeps messages in 'live' inbox		(+)		
	(-)		Adapts checking actions according to current priorities	(+)			
			Uses shortcuts to action email	(+)			
	(+)	(+)	Sends email to multiple recipients (cc, reply all, etc)	(-); (+)	(-)		(+); (-)
		(+); (-)	Sends 'work-critical' email		(+)		
		(-)	Sends clear, helpful and work-related email	(+)			(+)
	(-)	(-)	Respects others' priorities, workloads and boundaries	(+)			
	(-)	(-)	Triaging of email (read, action, file, delete)		(+)		
	(-)		Time management of email				
			Adds notes to email		(+)		

Final conceptual model (Stage 3)



Recommendations

Beneficial Email Action	Recommendations
Regular (not reactive checking)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turn off notifications • Check email at natural break points (roughly every 45 minutes)
Adapts checking actions to current priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use team inboxes • Use automatic rules (out-of-office) or forwarding rules • Remove quick-responding priorities • Use team inboxes when quick responding is work critical (e.g. customer service)
Sends clear, helpful and work-related email	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop policies for email guidance (e.g. etiquette, use of cc, etc)
Respects others' priorities, workloads and boundaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use 'delay send' options • Use team inboxes • Give PT workers more workload hours to deal with email
Triaging of email (read, action, file and delete)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As per checks above, to clear email throughout the day
Undertakes email training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer evidence-based email training • Focus on improving email self-efficacy

To be continued...?

- Research report available from ACAS:
<http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/4/4/Strategies-for-effectively-managing-email-at-work.pdf>
- Updating SLR from 2017-2019 to prepare for publication
- 12-month intervention study with wait-list control group, using email 'tips' to impact stress and productivity outcomes (Russell, Daniels and Jackson, *under prep*).

A solid teal square located to the left of the 'Thank you!' text.

Thank you!

- Questions
- Contact me: emma.russell@sussex.ac.uk